

MIKE GALLAGHER
8TH DISTRICT, WISCONSIN

1230 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
PHONE (202) 225-5665

DISTRICT OFFICE
1702 SCHUBERT ROAD
SUITE B
DE PERE, WI 54115
PHONE (920) 301-4500

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEES
SEAPOWER AND PROJECTION FORCES
INTELLIGENCE AND EMERGING THREATS
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
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AVIATION
COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

June 21, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

General Mark A. Milley
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff
9999 Joint Staff Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20318

Dear Secretary Austin and Chairman Milley,

From October 18-28, 2019, the World Military Games took place in Wuhan, China.¹ The games featured competitors from over 100 countries, including 280 American athletes and staff.² After the games, athletes from several nations reported becoming sick with symptoms they later recognized as consistent with COVID-19. For example, French pentathlete Elodie Clouvel reported becoming sick at the games and later was told by a military doctor that she may have contracted COVID-19.³ Reports also indicate that athletes from Italy, Germany, Sweden, and Luxembourg may all have become sick with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 at the games.⁴

One athlete from Luxembourg reported “nearly empty” streets in Wuhan during the games, recalling, “It was a ghost town” and “There were rumors that the government warned the inhabitants not to go out.”⁵

While anecdotal, these reports raise important questions about the timeline of the initial COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan. While the Chinese government first reported an unexplained illness in Wuhan in late December 2019, information released by the U.S. Department of State suggests that lab researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) became sick with symptoms

¹ Hersom, EJ, “2019 CISM Military World Games Opening Ceremonies [Image 1 of 10],” *Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (DVIDS)*, October 18, 2019.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/image/5844562/2019-cism-military-world-games-opening-ceremonies>

² DVIDS, “2019 CISM Military World Games,” *Defense Visual Information Distribution Service*, October 18, 2019 to October 27, 2019.

https://www.dvidshub.net/feature/2019MilGames?fbclid=IwAR2oFKM3GDAj1cubPOVjRytVT_pMC56Y3LIvoSm67vmakIM8CoKNZf30hpQ

³ Liao, George, “Coronavirus may have been spreading since Wuhan Military Games last October,” *Taiwan News*, May 12, 2020. <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3932712>

⁴ Sharpe, James, “Why DID so many athletes fall sick in Wuhan in October? More competitors reveal they were ill at the World Military Games months before China admitted coronavirus could be passed between humans,” *DailyMail.com*, May 16, 2020.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8327047/More-competitors-reveal-ill-World-Military-Games.html>. See also Liao, “Coronavirus may have been spreading since Wuhan Military Games last October.”

⁵ Sharpe, “Why DID so many athletes fall sick in Wuhan in October? More competitors reveal they were ill at the World Military Games months before China admitted coronavirus could be passed between humans.”

consistent with COVID-19 in fall 2019, well before the established beginning of the outbreak.⁶ Subsequent reporting has revealed that three researchers from the WIV sought hospital care for COVID-like symptoms in November 2019.⁷ Additionally, former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Robert Redfield has publicly estimated that the virus began circulating in Wuhan in September or October 2019 and new evidence suggests that COVID-19 may have been present in the U.S. as early as December 2019.⁸

Aware that the cluster of illnesses associated with the World Military Games casts doubt upon the Chinese Communist Party's official timeline, Chinese government officials such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Zhao Lijian have sought to deflect blame onto the U.S., recklessly speculating that "It might be U.S. Army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan" during the games.⁹

Given unanswered questions surrounding the origins of the pandemic, information involving the health of service members who participated in the 2019 games could provide key evidence in understanding when COVID-19 first emerged. Consequently, I respectfully request answers to the following questions:

1. How many of the American athletes and staff attending the 2019 World Military Games became ill with COVID-19-like symptoms during or shortly upon their return to the United States?
2. Of the home military facilities of the participating athletes and staff, how many experienced outbreaks of illnesses consistent with COVID-19 symptoms upon the return of service members from Wuhan?
3. Once COVID-19 was identified, how many of the military facilities visited by team members upon return from Wuhan experienced COVID-19 outbreaks during the first quarter of 2020, and how does that compare to the share of other military facilities that experienced COVID-19 outbreaks through March 31, 2020?

⁶ "Fact Sheet: Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology." Fact Sheet, Office of the Spokesperson, Department of State, last modified January 15, 2021,

<https://2017-2021.state.gov/fact-sheet-activity-at-the-wuhan-institute-of-virology/index.html>

⁷ Gordon, Michael; Strobel, Warren; Hinshaw, Drew, "Intelligence on Sick Staff at Wuhan Lab Fuels Debate on Covid-19 Origin," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/intelligence-on-sick-staff-at-wuhan-lab-fuels-debate-on-covid-19-origin-11621796228>

⁸ Gumbrecht, Jamie. "Exclusive: Former CDC Director Makes Controversial Claim that Covid-19 Began in a China Lab," *CNN*, March 26, 2021. https://www.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-vaccine-updates-03-26-21/h_8dc361e9c4b8fc77d03d3862eachbd9d6. See also Stobbe, Mike, "More Evidence Suggests COVID-19 Was in US by Christmas 2019," Associated Press, June 15, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/more-evidence-covid-in-us-by-christmas-2019-11346afc5e18eee81ebcf35d9e6caee2>.

⁹ Pickrell, Ryan, "Chinese Official Says US Army May Have 'Brought the Epidemic to Wuhan'," *Military.com*, March 12, 2020. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/03/12/chinese-official-says-us-army-may-have-brought-epidemic-wuhan.html>

4. Once COVID-19 was identified, did the Department test the service members who traveled to Wuhan for antibodies? If so, what portion of those results were positive, and when was this testing done?
5. Are there any open investigations, including under the auspices of an Inspector General, across the Department or the military services into possible connections between U.S. athletes who traveled to Wuhan and the outbreak of COVID-19?
6. Has the Department engaged with allied or partner militaries about illnesses surrounding the 2019 games? If so, how many participating militaries have indicated to the Department that their athletes or staff may have contracted COVID-like symptoms during or immediately after the Wuhan games?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Mike Gallagher
Member of Congress